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ABSTRACT

The proposal by the Louisiana State Superintendent of Education that non-public schools use a new public high school examination for graduation is described as an unwarranted regulation that threatens the pursuit of excellence and scholarship in private education. The proposed state exit examination is considered to be intrusive and inconsistent with statutory and constitutional law. It would demand the standardization of the curricula in non-public schools with the state curricula for public schools. The proposal is tied to the approval of a non-public school by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. It would require more regulation, sacrificing diversity and traditional values. The results on the American College Test (ACT) of graduating classes from 52 Louisiana Catholic high schools, revealing that 71% of the schools' graduating classes for 1988 scored above the state average of 17.1 for the ACT composite score, indicate that use of a state exit examination is not warranted. Exhibit 1 is a comparison of ACT scores for the 52 graduating classes from Louisiana Catholic high schools in 1988. (SLD)

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The Threat of a State Graduation Examination

For

Non-Public Schools in Louisiana

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The Threat of a State Graduation Examination
For
Non-Public Schools in Louisiana

A proposal by the State Superintendent of Education to require that non-public schools of Louisiana use a new public high school examination for graduation is an unwarranted regulation – and it threatens the pursuit of excellence and scholarship in private education. The so-called "state exit exam" is intrusive and totally inconsistent with statutory and constitutional law.

Moreover, the proposal can suffocate diversity in secondary education in Louisiana. It demands the standardization of the curricula in non-public schools with the state curriculum for public schools. In effect, independence in schooling is then homogenized by regulation.

The proposed requirement is unconditionally tied to the approval of a non-public school by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE). As such, it is punitive – and is inhibiting. All financial consideration aside, adoption of the requirement by SBESE opens the door for more regulation of non-public schools through its annual review and approval process – and provides the momentum for ultimately fusing the non-public school standards with the public school standards. Diversity and traditional values are then lost to new government control. In short, use of the state high school gradation examination for non-public schools is the precursor of amalgamating public and private secondary education. Vital individuality is lost! In particular, Catholic secondary schooling is threatened.

According to the Constitution of Louisiana, SBESE shall approve a non-public school "with a sustained curriculum or specialized course of study of quality at least equal to that prescribed for similar public schools". Approval of Catholic high schools is not in doubt.

* Presented to the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE) at a public meeting in Baton Rouge, LA, on 27 April 1989.

A new comparative study of 52 Catholic high schools in Louisiana has revealed that 71% or 37 of the schools' graduating classes for 1988 scored above the state average of 17.1 for the composite score on the American College Test (ACT). Such a performance, it is submitted, does not merit the use of a "state exit exam", as developed by the State Department of Education, to regulate non-public education in the Catholic high schools of Louisiana.

In Exhibit I, "A Comparison of the ACT Composite Scores for the 1988 Graduating Classes of Catholic High Schools in Louisiana" is presented.

The proposed "state exit exam" is poorly disguised as timely public accountability. Such blatant regulation, however, is false – and masquerades as a quality control. Catholic schools are already subjected to the best standard of quality control: the consumer. No other standard, especially the public high school graduation examination, is more rigorous.

Exhibit I

A Comparison of the ACT Composite Scores For The 1988 Graduating Classes of Catholic High Schools in Louisiana

Results of Survey	Number
Catholic High Schools Surveyed	52
Catholic High Schools Responding	49
Graduating Classes with Composite ACT Above State Average of 17.1	37
Graduating Classes with Composite ACT Below Statewide Average –	12
Schools within 0.2 units	3
Schools within 0.3 – 0.5	3
Schools within 0.6 – 2.0	0
Schools within 2.1 – 5.0	6